

3 July 1979



To your invitation to comment on the working of the NIO system, a few thoughts:

1. All things considered, I would -- for now -- leave it basically alone.

-- Those who hanker to return to something like ONE are betrayed by nostalgia. That structure was based on a false dichotomy between analysis and projection; it divided our resources and produced competition and duplication where mutual support was required; and in the end it achieved a product in which form and process triumphed over substance.

-- Though in many respects the NIO system makes no sense either structurally or procedurally, there are things of substantial importance it has done quite well: from my perspective, direct support of the DCI; improved relations with and closer support of the NSC staff; direct inputs into the policy-forming process via various interagency working groups; much closer working relationships with the DDO and the overseas stations; a better organized watch and warning system; a very large -- even if often wasteful -- input to the review of the adequacy of information sources; and at least some measure of guidance and review of the analytical output of the NFAC offices.

-- And while both system and individual NIOs must share in the blame for those functions that have not been effectively carried out

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(organization and production of estimative and interdisciplinary analyses), "share" is the right word. We have had too many reorganizations and changes of leadership; we have shifted our emphasis with each change of leaders, and we still do not have understood priorities that are enforced; despite a decade of emphasis on building up analytical resources, they are still not commensurate with the overall task, the priorities, or our changing world interests; and while we go on emphasizing the importance of the community product, the community is -- in most cases -- a myth. Whatever system we might have had, it would be overwhelmed by these fundamental problems.

2. In my view there are therefore only long-term solutions. First, if we cannot re-invert the pyramid in which a vast horde of taskers, requesters, staffers, etc., ultimately rely in many instances on the too few analysts who do the work, we must make a further effort to redress that balance. Second, once we have at hand -- in something that can really be called a National Foreign Assessment Center -- the requisite number of analysts with the requisite skills, then we can proceed to group them in a structure that facilitates (or at least poses the fewest organizational obstacles to) putting out the various kinds of intelligence that are bound to be required. With only some reservations, I still think that purpose would best be served by a basically regional structure. It would of course be necessary to retain a certain number of functional offices to provide support and to do basic research in the economic, military, and scientific areas. But the various geographic divisions (with an interdisciplinary staff) would otherwise be responsible for putting out the full range of

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intelligence products that is required -- current, policy support, and estimative. The NIOs and their functions would be absorbed into that structure.

3. I would assume that it would be some time before we were prepared to undertake such radical surgery, even with all the advantages it would have in the way of consolidating resources, clarifying lines of communication, and pinpointing responsibility. However, there may be a few things that even now we might do -- or avoid doing -- that would be helpful. Among these:

-- If we are going to continue to have an interagency product, then the very top level must make that priority clear, not only to the agencies which do not now participate, but also to the NFAC offices who have to do the work against competing priorities, including their own ideas.

-- If we are going to put continued emphasis on an interdisciplinary product, we must take a much harder look at the production programs of the individual offices, develop better procedures for organizing and monitoring inter-office projects, and define clearly what role, if any, the NIOs are supposed to have in this.

-- There remains more generally a problem, I think, in the lack of understanding everywhere about the range of responsibilities that the NIO has or should have. Offhand, about one-fifth of my time is spent on what is widely presumed to be the NIO's main responsibility -- interagency assessments. Some of the remaining four-fifths is absorbed by nuisance

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activities, but I think much of what I have to do is necessary and useful. But is this taken into account when we wonder whether the system is "working"?

-- Related to this are the familiar problems of communication and responsibility. Who has ordered up what and for what purpose remains a still-too-frequent mystery, despite the closest of working relations with the operating divisions (Presidential briefings being one of the more frequent of such mysteries). Does the NIO in any real sense remain the DCI's chief referent for substantive questions, and if so, has he the means to ensure himself of access to and review of substantive judgments as and when they are made?

-- Do we have an agreed concept of what role the Senior Review Panel should have? Personally, I have great admiration for the individual panel members, who have on a number of occasions made most helpful suggestions. But it is my impression that the Panel itself is torn between alternative courses -- whether to become more actively involved in the production process (at risk to the responsibility of the NIOs and to its own objectivity in reviewing the product) or whether to remain more aloof and become a court of final judgment (at the risk of being another layer -- or ignored).

4. Finally, three cautionary notes.

-- Should the NIOs be given "professional estimates writers"? In my view, no. I think each "desk" in OPA should have the necessary numbers and skills to be relieved of the pressures of ongoing developments

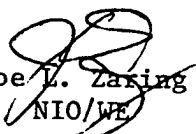
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to take a longer view from time to time without being isolated from those pressures. If, as has been suggested, we should do more in the way of regional assessments, OPA division senior analysts should be suited to that task.

-- Should there be a chief of NIOs? This might be helpful in solving common problems, developing a more collegial approach, etc. But we don't have that many problems in common, what is important is the working relationship the NIO has with the analysts in the operating divisions, and a representational figure for the NIOs collectively is simply a step back toward ONE.

-- Should the NIOs be reattached to the DCI? That was tried once, and the response from the DDI (NFAC) was to set up a competing mechanism in order -- it was said -- to retrieve control over his own resources. I don't see that it would help to try that again.


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